

# THE PARIS CONGRESS OF THE I.F.T.U.

By HARRY POLLITT

**T**HE Triennial Congress of the International Federation of Trade Unions met in Paris on the thirteenth anniversary of the outbreak of war. It is no coincidence that just as thirteen years ago the I.F.T.U. ignominiously collapsed when decisive action should have been taken, so on this occasion with a most serious international situation confronting the workers of the world, a situation calling for decisive action in many spheres, this futile International collapsed like a pack of cards, not as a result of fighting or facing these issues, but in an atmosphere of the most terrible intrigue, corruption, and "back-stairs" work that has ever disgraced the International Labour Movement.

All over the world the workers are facing a capitalist offensive on their wages, hours, and working conditions ; industrial and political rights of organisation that have been looked upon as secure for all time are being ruthlessly suppressed and smashed in every capitalist country ; the situation existing in China demands the most serious and careful attention ; there is ever-increasing capitalist hostility against Soviet Russia ; a terrible White Terror is reigning in Poland, the Balkans, and Hungary ; yet these things apparently were not the concern of the I.F.T.U., and no policy or organisational measures emanated from the Paris Congress dealing with a single one of the fundamental issues now facing the working class.

It was common knowledge before this Congress met that financially, organisationally, and politically it was bankrupt. It has not, and never has had, any real international outlook. The bureaucrats in control of the machine have only been concerned with preserving the favour of the International Labour Office and carrying on a violent campaign to prevent any effective steps being taken to bring about unity in an international movement that is split as a result of the existence of two trade union internationals, and the fact that there are a number of countries whose trade union movements are not affiliated to either of these internationals :

The I.F.T.U. is the institution which Mr. Purcell in his presidential speech declared must provide the driving force for international trade unionism ; and the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, knowing all the above facts but never taking the responsibility of acquainting trade unionists in this country with them, placed a resolution on the Agenda of the Paris Congress of this International calling for a Committee of Inquiry to be established "in order that the Federation may become an organisation of universal scope and influence."

The events in Paris should not give rise to the assumption that the General Council was standing for some fundamental change in the way in which international unity could be achieved. Its official resolution and Mr. Purcell's speech were in practical effect what Amsterdam has stood for ever since its inauguration, namely, that world unity can only come through the I.F.T.U. and any other existing International must be dissolved and its affiliated organisations automatically disaffiliated and unconditionally accept the constitution and statutes laid down by Amsterdam. Let us remember that at Vienna this was interpreted as only being possible when it was done in a manner "compatible with the dignity of the I.F.T.U." Paris has displayed the dignity of the I.F.T.U. before the workers of the world.

The workers everywhere must take into consideration the facts, and these are very simple. There is a Red International of Labour Unions in existence. Mr. Purcell in his speech referred to the necessity of getting contact with the Trade Union Movements of India, China, &c. The R.I.L.U. has already won the affiliation of the Chinese Trade Union Movement, and the Javanese, Mexican, and Japanese Trade Union Movements have all had close connections with the R.I.L.U.

At this point it is pertinent to quote what Fenner Brockway, speaking at the I.L.P. Summer School on August 5, said in regard to another International : he said the "Third International has accomplished magnificent work in making a contact with the coloured peoples, particularly in China, India, and Africa." It can be asserted without fear of contradiction that this statement is also true of the R.I.L.U. When the world situation compels the British Trade Union Movement to pay great attention to

international organisation, when the acute capitalist crisis compels British trade unionists to seek new allies in India, China, South Africa, &c., is it to be expected that the Russian Trade Unions will leave the R.I.L.U. to join up with the I.F.T.U. whose Dutch, French, and Belgian leaders reign supreme in their European exclusiveness and loyalty to their capitalist masters at Geneva ?

The way to international trade union unity is not through the Vienna resolution of 1924 or the General Council's Paris resolution of 1927. The situation at the Paris Congress and the Brown disclosures once again provide the British Movement with the opportunity of rising to the new possibilities of the situation. It is no longer a question of appointing a new secretary or of obtaining new headquarters ; it is the supreme question of altering the whole conception of what international trade unionism means and deciding how best this reorganisation can be achieved out of the existing conditions.

What steps will be taken to achieve this result is a matter which will have to be decided by the Edinburgh Trades Union Congress. The British Movement cannot exist in isolation. To those who say "a plague on both your houses" it is only necessary to mention that the world situation in which the British Trade Union Movement finds itself, compels it to participate in international affairs.

The key to the situation is in the hands of the British and Russian Movements. If the Anglo-Russian Advisory Council calls an immediate conference for the purpose of reviewing the position and the necessary *will* to unity is developed at that conference, in a short space of time world unity can be achieved.

The Russians are the strongest section in the R.I.L.U., the British have been the strongest section in the I.F.T.U. Both these trade union movements have a great influence on the trade union movements of South America, India, the whole of the Scandinavian countries, and the revolutionary workers in Germany, France, &c. Further, they could summon to their assistance many prominent international trade union leaders who are personally in favour of unity, and who would be willing to join an Anglo-Russian Committee which was co-opting for this specific task all those international leaders willing to co-operate in organising a world con-

ference at which the trade union movement of every country in the world would have an opportunity of being represented, together with representation from the International Trade Secretariats.

At such a Congress one united trade union international could be created (an *International* in every sense of the word) and an end made once and for all to the present splits and divisions that exist in the World Labour Movement.

The Edinburgh Trades Union Congress has a tremendous responsibility before it. It will have to consider both the General Council's Report on its connections with the Russian Trade Union Movement and also the policy of the General Council in regard to the Paris Congress. It is to be hoped that there will be no attempts to divert the Congress to side issues ; the international situation is such that it will be a crime against the working class if decisive steps are not taken at Edinburgh to bring about unity.

If the spirit which was in evidence at the Hull, Scarborough, and Bournemouth Congresses is again evidenced at Edinburgh, and if those British leaders who in speeches on Russia or in articles on *Trade Union Unity* supported the movement for a single world international, boldly face the Congress and fight for those things to which they have paid lip-service, a mighty movement will be developed that will sweep away all the bureaucratic barriers, the lies, treachery, and conspiracy against unity that have made the official leadership of the International Federation of Trade Unions stink in the nostrils of every decent worker.

The World Congress must be called. That is the sole way to world unity. Whatever is decided with regard to the Anglo-Russian Committee, the responsibility rests with the General Council of the British Trades Union Congress to see that a World Trade Union Congress is convened.